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ABSTRACT

The concept of an intercultural center, primarily located in "inner city" areas with a high concentration of low income minority groups, is explored in this discussion of the Tulare County, California institution. An attempt to reach and teach members of minority groups precludes a formalized approach to instruction and seeks to develop greater intercultural understanding through alternative methods of teaching. Principal remarks include: (1) community description, (2) Intercultural Center approach toward meeting community needs, and (3) multi-culturalism and the identity crisis. (RL)

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THE CUTLER OROSI INTERCULTURAL CENTER

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THE CUTLER-OROSI INTERCULTURAL CENTER

INTRODUCTION

Intercultural Centers represent a creative attempt to introduce inter-ethnic cultural materials into community life, within an educational context and a recreational setting. They bring a humanistic and non-threatening approach to the learning process, without the onus of the institutional environment which frequently inhibits members of minorities from becoming involved in more formalized societal programs.

By facilitating positive interaction between disadvantaged minorities and the mainstream of community life, and intercultural center can provide a forum for sharing concerns; this in turn brings a new sense of civic responsibility and accountability which ultimately must improve the quality of life for all citizens within a locality. Concommitant with the concept of participative management in community affairs is the sense of pride in self and cultural heritage which emerges in those people who previously regarded themselves as second class citizens, and who in fact, have all too frequently been our forgotten Americans. More prosaically, and Intercultural Center can fulfill the need for a community meeting place, can provide the housing for a recreational program, or can become a stage for community entertainment.

Historically, intercultural centers have been located in "inner city" areas with a high concentration of low income minority groups. There have been few attempts to develop them in rural communities, even where the minority concentration is as great as or greater than that in the cities. Yet it is the children of the rural poor who are acutely disadvantaged, both in terms of contact with cultures other than their own and in exposure to resources and people outside their own limited environment.

OBJECTIVES

To offer an opportunity through education and exposure for better intercultural understanding, in its truest and most pragmatic sense.

To offer alternative models for the teaching of the social sciences, including the preparation of bilingual units in anthropology and related subjects.

To utilize a multi-media approach, including the use of art, theatre and film as they relate to the humanistic disciplines.

To provide a resource for the exploration of curriculum innovations.

To provide identity experiences for Mexican-American youth in a bilingual setting which encourage feelings of pride in self, pride in culture, and pride in their place in the community.

To reach and teach the potential school drop-out.

To widen and supplement the experiences of students and their parents by encouraging community participation in a continuous learning milieu, both inside and outside the school structure.

To promote creativity in the arts, and to allow for exposure to the various artistic media.

To provide an information center for the community, as well as to serve as an open house for recreational activities, entertainment, discussion and group meetings.

To facilitate intergroup dynamics.

COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION

Tulare County, located in the San Joaquin Valley, is one of the largest and richest agricultural areas of the nation. Its important role as a center of California's migrant subculture has been well documented. The problems imposed by the dichotomy of prosperous, settled farmers and a migrating stream of unskilled farm workers who frequently speak no English have long been recognized by social and educational agencies. In the schools of Tulare County, the 64% Spanish surnamed students are almost all children of agricultural laborers. The problems of their poverty are intensified by the fact that they are set apart spacially, linguistically and culturally from the middle class community.

The population of the town of Cutler is approximately 3000 and is predominantly Mexican-American, Spanish-speaking, low-income. The town of Orosi, located a mile away with a population of 2000 is not as markedly disadvantaged and is more ethnically balanced, in terms of Anglo-Mexican-American distribution. The two towns, together with the surrounding communities of East Orosi and Yettem, comprise the Cutler-Orosi Unified School District, total population: 6,000 residents. Statistics from the school district show that 2/3 of the district's students are Mexican-American, with 40-60% of the families subsisting below the national poverty level.

The lack of recreational and entertainment facilities in itself constitutes a primary need for the Cutler-Orosi community. For the youth of the area there is literally no place to go, nothing to do. The high school students spend endless hours "cruising" the streets, or standing on street corners. There is no public recreation center, no park, no bowling alleys, no tennis court, no swimming pool. The nearest movie house is in Visalia, more than twenty miles away, and the average admission price is $.75 per person. Cost and distance hence make the movies inaccessible for the poor in this area.

The absence of any type of recreational or entertainment facility which could be utilized by the community as a whole is a perpetuating factor in the continuing alienation of the Mexican-American and the Anglo American populations in the Cutler-Orosi area. The two groups lead very separate lives, each based on its own distinct culture. To the Anglo population the Mexican-American farm worker is simply there-a necessary part of the agricultural economy, but set apart from the rest of the community by his language, his color, and his lov educational and economic attainment. As a consequence, it is only rarely that Mexican-Americans attend the Anglo-dominated P.T.A., club or other civic meetings. On the other hand, the Anglo community keeps its distance from the churches, meetings and festivals which are sponsored by the Mexican-American community. Each group is a self-contained entity.

The schism between the two groups of students within the schools is as wide as that which exists among their parents. Although the Cutler Orosi District lists 66% of its students as Mexican-American, clubs organized under school auspices have a membership that is predominantly Anglo. School-sponsored dances and band concerts are poorly attended by the Mexican-American students. This, in part, is because the Mexican-American student sees the school as a place one "has to go" and not as a place where he can have fun or enjoy activities; he feels neither comfortable nor welcome. The only organized school club in which the Spanish-surnamed young people participate is the Latin American Club. Even it is viewed with some resentment by the farm workers and their children, who feel it is dominated by the more affluent Mexican Americans with the community (who prefer being called "Latin Americans").

All too often the schism between the two groups of students is perpetuated, and even broadened, by the attitudes-for the most part unconscious- of the white

middle-class teachers in the schools. This is not unique to the Cutler-Orosi area, but applies to teachers throughout the nation. Although there has been considerable attitudinal improvement in the past few years, the tendency of many teachers still is to view the "culturally different" child as "educationally handicapped". Teachers who lack an understanding and appreciation of the differences between cultures tend to ignore the rich heritage which the minority child brings to the classroom situation; often they concentrate on trying to change him to fit what they believe to be the middle class norm. The failure to perceive the child within his environmental and cultural background can result in diminished teacher expectations that predestine that child to failure both in the classroom and with his peers of the prevailing ethnic group.

All of this is not to say that there is deliberate or overt discrimination in these communities, but simply that discrepancies in education and economic status, the language barrier, and the difference in values and goals between the Anglo and Mexican-American populations compound intercultural understandings. In the Mexican-American community this misunderstanding takes the form of apathy, withdrawal, resentment, and at times hostility, particularly among the young. In the Anglo community, the lack of understanding of the culture of Mexican-American neighbors perpetuates stereotypes, prejudices and fears. The overwhelming need is for each to begin to know the other and so take that first step on the road to understanding. We perceive the Intercultural Center as a positive setting wherein communication - and intercultural consensus - can begin to occur.

THE INTERCULTURAL CENTER APPROACH TOWARD MEETINGS COMMUNITY NEEDS

Teacher Corps Rural-Migrant in operation in the Cutler-Orosi District since the fall of 1967, believes, philosophically and pragmatically, that teachers must function beyond the confines of the classroom. It was in line with this

philosophy that the idea for an Intercultural Center was conceived. An abandoned Seventh Day Adventist Church in the town of Cutler was leased to house the Center. With the help of Teacher Corps interns, teachers in the local schools, church personnel, members of the Cutler-Orosi Community Action group, and others from the community who volunteered their time, the building was renovated. Carpenters, painters, plumbers, all came forward to help. Someone donated paint. Someone else found a piece of carpeting to cover splintered floorboards. Before the Center was even ready to function, students in the local schools lettered a simple sign, and children began dropping in.

With USC Teacher Corps staff and interns serving as volunteer coordinators and resource personnel, with students, parents, and other community people handling its actual daily operation, the Center was declared officially open to the public in December (1969). Tutoring in English, English as a Second Language, math and science are offered; arts and crafts classes, and painting and pottery workshops are scheduled for children of all grade levels; a library of sorts has been compiled; = film workshops are in process and the Center has quickly become in demand as a meeting place for a variety of community activities.

There was a Christmas Party just two weeks after the opening. And in February, 1970, barely two months after it had been established, the Intercultural Center had its first open house. Student art work, student-made films, and student photography were displayed. Free refreshments were served, and a Laurel and Hardy movie was shown in the evening. Those who were able to do so donated 50 cents. The Open House was a great success, with entire families participating in the activities. With the exception of art teachers who are paid $1.40 per hour, (low-income students) all of the personnel involved in the operation of the Center work on a volunteer basis, and it is anticipated that they, and other

concerned people, will continue to donate their time and efforts. But money must be found for supplies and equipment to maintain even the limited services now offered by the Center. To expand those services, and to initiate new programs to meet the objectives upon which the Center was founded, will require outside funding on a regular basis.

The Intercultural Center can serve as an immediate relief to the "there's nothing to do, nowhere to go" syndrome so prevalent not only in this community, but in most rural communities. At the same time it goes several steps beyond the recreation center or settlement house concept. It represents a purposeful attempt to substitute for boredom and provincialism constructive learning activities and exposure to innovative ideas. And because the Center is a community project, based on a mutuality of interests and with the specific aim of bettering understanding of the different racial and ethnic groups, it becomes a vehicle for transcending the barriers between the local Mexican American and Anglo populations.

The theme of the Center is the presentation of manking from an anthropological focus, with all cultures being of equal worth and equally worthy of interest. Too often cultures alien to our own are viewed only comparatively and with what anthropologists call "the bias of the exotic". The Center's approach is based on the assumption that man is everywhere the same, with the same drives and needs, distinguished only by different environments and different heritages. Such an approach will help to dissipate the prejudices and stereotypes held by both the Anglo and the Mexican American populations and will, hopefully, lead to more open-minded, receptive attitudes.

Intercultural Centers frequently have been located on school campuses, where only limited activities could be offered within the confinement of limited space and limited time. Removing the setting from the school premises allows for freedom to develop the kind of physical surroundings and emotional atmosphere

conducive to creativity and exploration. By locating off campus, the Center in effect reaches many campuses, involves students of all ages, and allows for a more free and easy involvement of community people. Furthermore, it does away with the classroom-school connotation to which most young people, and particularly those students from minority groups, react so negatively. Instead, it is a place staffed by friendly, interested people where one can pursue his own interests, create his own work, and at the same time gain a new respect for learning and discipline which will carry over into the school setting.

MULTI-CULTURALISM AND THE IDENTITY CRISIS

One of the major problems facing all young people is their own "identity crisis". Their search for identity is of particular import to Mexican-American youth. Often knowing little of his own cultural heritage, he still does not accept, nor is he accepted by, the culture in which he lives. Educators have offered lip service to the desirability of bi-culturism, but in practice we have geared our programs toward the complete acculturation and assimilation of minorities. The Center offers a bilingual setting in which the young Mexican-American can develop a deeper understanding of, and pride in, the history of his ancestors their contributions, their values and achievements. With a more positive image of the culture of his parents and the consequent increase of pride in his own self-worth, he will become less defensive in his attitude toward the values and norms of the Anglo environment.

For the Anglo community, a study of "La Raza" the values, sentiments and history of the Mexican-American provides an opportunity to develop understanding and empathy for their neighbors. Nowhere does this feeling need to be fostered more than among educators. Through workshops and resource exchanges the Intercultural Center will place a particular emphasis on helping teachers and allied school personnel attain not only a knowledge and understanding of the culture of

the Mexican-American and an empathy toward that culture, but also on developing an awareness of the impact of the process of acculturation on the personality of the individual.

Prejudice can be a two-way street: the Mexican-American needs to learn about the Anglo culture and heritage, but he needs to learn in a setting where he does not feel that his own beginnings suffer by comparison. And both the Anglo American and the Mexican-American together, in the environment of an Intercultural Center, can begin an approach toward learning about black history, black culture, black norms and values. Similarly, stereotyped misinformation and prejudices regarding any other culture -- Japanese, Chinese, Indian, European, or whatever -- can be attacked by education and exposure.

ENVIRONMENTAL SPACES

One of the major themes of the Center is the creating of environmental spaces. There is no defined way to create an environment. It can be done outdoors, through architecture and landscaping; it can be done in an empty room with the use of music; it can even be done in the confines of a cardboard box. Given a plan and a direction, there is no place where it is impossible to create an environment.

The creation of an environmental room imposes many and varied demands upon the student; he must become by turns an artist, a technician, a historian. It is a complicated task and calls for cohesive group effort. The students must plan together, work together, help and criticize one another, and utilize, as a group, the talents and knowledge of each individual.

There is, of course, no limit to the different types of environments that can be created; but for an example, let us take the environment of a large city: The walls and ceiling of a room can be covered with white paper. Murals depicting life in a city can be painted on the walls; cardboard can be used to create buildings; slides can be projected overhead or into appropriate spaces; even

the smells of the city can be reproduced. Actual objects peculiar to the city can be brought in and arranged, movies pertinent to city life can be shown within the environment, theater can be presented, people can gather to listen to a speaker or to participate in group discussions. More than one environment can be created in a simultaneous fashion to provide comparison and contrast. The environment of a primitive tribe, for example, can be created alongside the environment of an urban metropolis. The student learns through a multi-mediated approach, to recreate a particular time or culture. In so doing he becomes a part of his own creation and a part of its environment.

FILMS AND TAPES

Student and community-made films form a cornerstone for a project such as the environmental rooms. One of the most effective and exciting ways to interest students in learning about almost any subject is through films they make themselves. The students decide what to film, story-board the shooting sequences, shoot the pictures, splice and edit the film, meet deadlines, and become actively involved in the many other decision-making responsibilities. The process of film production increases awareness of self and environment, develops the gamut of artistic, scholarly and technical skills, and offers the opportunity for communication in its most unadulterated form.

Professional films will be rented or borrowed by the Center including foreign films and those whose sole purpose is to entertain. Educational films, conceived especially for viewing by the migrant parents, are available from the Office of Economic Opportunity and the California State Department of Education. In addition, educational television programs from San Francisco, Los Angeles and Fresno will be received at the Center. The Center will use Teacher Corps video tape equipment to film children and other students at work on projects, in class

and during community discussions.

PUBLISHING

We hope to publish a newspaper at the Center. There is no student newspaper at the local high school, so the Center could provide a needed supplement to the school's curriculum by offering such a publication. The printing facilities could be used for other purposes as well, such as announcements, invitations, student projects, etc. Even more than the practical functions that the publishing process fulfills are the valuable technical and writing skills which will be learned through the actual process of converting thoughts and ideas into printed words.

SOCIAL SCIENCES CURRICULUM

One way in which the Intercultural Center hopes to effect lasting change is through curriculum changes in the schools themselves. Courses in Anthropology and Mexican-American culture and history developed by Teacher Corps interns are now being taught in two local schools. The Center plans to develop units in the social sciences for grades K-12 and make them available to school districts and teachers throughout Tulare County. The curriculum content will be inter-disciplinary, but its focus will be Anthropology, defined simply as the study of "Man and His Works". Its presentation will be multi-media oriented. Units in Mexican-American culture and history entitled "La Raza" are being developed. Artifacts, movies, slides and other materials are being collected from museums and private collections. The student will be urged to explore his own community, culture and history through art, film making, theatre, and writing, so as to discover, through direct experience, the patterns of culture and cultural change.

LIBRARY

It is hoped that the Center eventually will have a fairly complete library albeit largely paperback. The books will range from the third grade level up

to college level, and will be non-fiction, focusing mainly on the social sciences.

ART

The functions of the experiences in the art workshop will be to sharpen the student's awareness of the integral relation of art to life and to give him the tools and techniques through which he may express this relationship. The aims of the art program will be threefold:

- Cultural: the student's interest and knowledge of the arts will be broadened and his appreciation of fine and industrial arts heightened;
- Pedagogical: visual, mental and manual skills will be increased;
- Economic: the art workshop, at least in some instances, can lead toward vocational training.

The art room will be equipped for weaving, ceramics, painting, interior design, sculpture, etc., and will function in coordination with other facets of the Center. For example, the art workshop can be used by students doing research into various cultures or periods of history; the students can reproduce the pottery, jewelry, or sculpture of the time or the culture. Or the workshop can be utilized in conjunction with the print-shop, with the students illustrating and designing their own books. Art festivals will be planned by the students to exhibit their work to the community. However, the finished product of the student will be considered secondary in importance to the growth in pursposefulness, resourcefulness, creative ability and sensitivity that will emerge as the result of his exposure and involvement in the field of art.

THEATER

Drama will be another concept-building technique at the Center. A live bi-lingual theater will stimulate free creativity, and since that creativity

necessitates a constant awareness of the needs and responses of the other actors, group interaction evolves as well. Because interaction with other students in the school setting is often limited for the Mexican-American, its presence in this kind of an undertaking can be particularly important. He not only gains self-confidence by departing from his usual role of passivity to assume the role of active participant within a group situation, but he also gains increased language proficiency and fluency, which, further enhances his self-confidence. Special workshops will be offered by professional groups and individuals. On-the-spot improvisations will be encouraged to help develop more self-awareness, self-confidence and increased language ability. The presentation of live theater will embrace many skills in addition to acting. Workshops will be offered on techniques of lighting, scenery design, costuming, art and music.

Sample Daily Schedule - Cutler-Orosi Inter-Cultural Center

Monday	afternoon:	Children's Art Workshop	4:15 to 5:30 P.M.
	evening:	Cutler Orosi Youth Group	6 to 7 " "
Tuesday	afternoon:	Crocheting class	4 to 5 " "
	evening:	High School Art	7 to 9 " "
Wed:	afternoon:	Children's Art Workshop	4:15 to 5:30 " "
	evening:	Cutler Boy Scouts	6:30 to 8 " "
Thursday:	afternoon:	Children's film study	4 to 6 " "
	evening:	High School film	7 to 8 " "
		Guitar class	7 and 8 " "
Friday:	afternoon:	closed	
	evening:	Entertainment night	7 to 10 " "
		Movies, etc. (50 cents)	
Saturday:	open for individual projects		
	evening:	closed or no scheduled activity	
Sunday:	afternoon:	closed or no scheduled activity	
	evening:	open for individual projects	

Other activities:

Toy loan open whenever Center is open
Library open during all these times
Vollyball games on weekends and in evenings
fund raising activities whenever scheduled

ALL ACTIVITIES FREE EXCEPT FUND RAISING MOVIES AND SPECIAL EVENTS.

FUTURE PLANS

The program has subsisted thus far with initiative, dedication and elbow grease as its chief resources. The Teacher Corps staff have acted as volunteer consultants and resource specialists. Teacher Corps interns and consultants from a variety of disciplines have given their time and talents. Both the community response and the community participation have been gratifying. On the deficit side there has been an overwhelming frustration at the lack of funds for the supplies and equipment which would allow the full utilization of so much talent, energy, creativity and dedication.

The facility and the grounds are for sale. The Cutler-Intercultural Center, Inc., a non-profit corporation established within the community, proposes to purchase the property for use as a permanent community center. The board of directors of the non-profit corporation would oversee the activities of the center and submit reports to the appropriate agencies. Maintenance funds to allow the center to continue are critical.